



BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Office of Fire & Aviation

Operations Alert

No. 12-01

Date: June 22, 2012

Subject: Firefighter Safety

Area of Concern: Fire & Aviation Operations

In the past few months, BLM units have experienced rapid drying of fuels, record indices, and fire activity that is abnormal for this time of year. Extreme fire behavior and resistance to control is already occurring earlier than normal in many areas. Weather and fuel condition forecasts seem to indicate that these conditions will worsen and persist for the next several months.

Chain saw and snag incidents, engine rollovers, an aircraft accident, emergency landing, and heat-related illnesses have occurred; several have resulted in fatalities. These accidents and incidents seem to be occurring earlier and more frequently than normal.

Firefighters should remember that fire season is just beginning for most parts of the country; the 2012 fire season has the potential to be long, arduous, and difficult.

Recommendations

- **Pace yourself.** Remember there will be many fire assignments to come, and managing fatigue and firefighter health now and as the season progresses will result in increased safety and efficiency.
- **Stick to the basics.** Remember adequate briefings, solid tactical and operational plans, and simple tactics such as “anchor flank and pinch” and “one foot in the black” are a recipe for success. Indirect attack may be appropriate; remember to allow time and space to accomplish it safely. When conditions change, a “tactical pause” and reevaluation of the plan are wise. LCES must ALWAYS be maintained.
- **Get there and back in one piece.** Deliberate, defensive, and safe driving will get you to the incident and home every time.
- **Recognize distractions and focus on the mission at hand.** Administrative tasks, home unit issues, and non-operational duties are important; remember these are secondary to our mission of fighting fire aggressively and safely. Maintain sensitivity to operations. You owe it to yourself, your family, and fellow firefighters to put these distractions aside and concentrate on your assignment.
- **Utilize aviation resources effectively and efficiently.** Current conditions in many areas of the country require an aggressive organized air and ground response to achieve success in initial attack. Effective utilization of aviation assets means launching IA aircraft as part of the initial dispatch rather than waiting for ground resources to arrive on scene and request aviation support. Coordinate and communicate this expectation to your IA IC's and cooperators. A limited number of aviation assets are available for fire suppression activities; efficiency and sharing should be a priority.
- **When utilizing aviation assets, ask these questions:**
 1. Is this flight necessary?
 2. Does the risk vs. benefit warrant utilizing aviation assets?
 3. Is there a more effective way to deliver fire suppressants?
 4. If the weather changes, do I have an alternate plan to replace reliance on aviation assets?
 5. Are qualified personnel in place to direct and supervise aviation operations?

For additional information contact:

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